

| Aleksandra Majewska

(10 April 1943 – 30 April 2022)

Aleksandra Majewska – Ola to her friends – came from the respected Sokolnicki family in Greater Poland. She was the daughter of Witold Sokolnicki and Elżbieta, née Rembowska. Her father fought in the September 1939 campaign, in which he was wounded and lost a leg. Later he joined the Home Army. Ola's mother lost her life in the Warsaw Uprising, and little Ola was taken in by her father's relatives, who took her to the family home in Komorowo after the uprising. There, she was reunited with her father, who took her to Cieszyn Wielkopolski. That was just the beginning of the family's peregrinations across Poland. Her father remarried and a few years later the family relocated to Poznań.

Having completed elementary school in Poznań in 1957, Aleksandra followed the family tradition and enrolled in the Sacré Cœur high school in the village of Polska Wieś (today Pobiedziska outside of Poznań). She passed her leaving exams in 1961 and was accepted to the University of Warsaw's Department of Mediterranean Archaeology. It was at that time that she met her future husband, Krzysztof Majewski, whom she married in 1966. The young couple settled in Warsaw and Aleksandra began working at the National Museum there in August 1967. Not long afterward came the children – Maciek, Bieta and Ania. What had been a happy family life was marred by Krzysztof's unexpected death in 1993, from which Aleksandra was never fully able to recover. From that point on, she occupied herself with taking care of her grandchildren and older family members, as well as with her academic and exhibition work at the museum. She was engaged in social causes, for example, bringing Solidarity pamphlets to the NMW from the Gdańsk shipyard in the 80s and serving as the head of the Solidarity trade union at the museum in the 90s (1992–96). She also devoted herself to the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia.

The scope of her scholarly interest was wide. From the very early days of her work at the museum, she was involved in studying sculptures and figurines from the museum's collection. Her publications on individual artefacts are model academic papers thanks to Majewska's excellent understanding of form and her ability to place an object in the historical and artistic context of the period of its creation.¹ She also conducted broader research concerning Polish collecting tradition, having a particular interest in the activity of Stanisław Kostka-Potocki, Michał Tyszkiewicz and Mieczysław Geniusz.² She took part in the International Congress of Egyptology: in the first edition in Cairo in 1976 and the sixth edition in Turin in 1991, where

¹ Aleksandra Majewska: "Tête éthiopienne du Musée National de Varsovie," *Études et Travaux*, no. 3 (1969), pp. 55–67; "Posąg boga Amona ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, 32 (1988), pp. 7–24; "Rzeźba kapłana egipskiego ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, 23–24 (1989–90), pp. 75–89; "Golden Osiris' in the National Museum in Warsaw," *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, Ann. 42, no. 1–4 (2001), pp. 63–79; "Statuette of a Snake-Legged Anubis," *Études et Travaux*, 25 (2012), pp. 213–24. [All bibliographic entries henceforth cited without author's name – ed.].

² "Stanisław Kostka Potocki. Życiorys i działalność publiczna," in *Stanisław Kostka Potocki – archeolog i działacz Oświecenia*, exh. cat., Lublin Museum (Lublin, 1987), pp. 5–16; "La collection égyptienne des Tyszkiewicz à Łohojsk," in *Warsaw Egyptological Studies I, Essays in honour of Prof. Dr. Jadwiga Lipińska* (Warsaw, 1997), pp. 171–90, pl. XXIII–XXX; "Wątek egipski w życiu Mieczysława Geniusza," *Światowit*, vol. 42 (1999), fasc. A, pp. 77–83.

she gave talks on Polish Egyptological collections, later published in the congress acts.³ As a member of the ICOM Committee for Egyptology, she attended the ICOM-CIPEG conference annually. She was also a member of the International Association of Egyptologists.

Something quite different was her museum work. Aleksandra Majewska believed that the popularisation of Egyptian art and culture was an area of the Egyptologist's work that offered room for creativity and imagination, and for that reason she eagerly created and organised Egyptological exhibitions in various Polish cities, delving into various aspects of Ancient Egypt. Initially, she worked together with Witold Dobrowolski, and later, from 1993, with yours truly. I look back on our trips together as experiences that were highly enjoyable, interesting and satisfying – their fruit being thought-provoking and academically strong exhibitions that always enjoyed great popularity. Egypt possesses a great power of attraction, mummies and sarcophagi being a “must have” in any museum boasting of an Egyptian exhibition. Together, we visited a string of cities, mostly in southern Poland – Legnica, Lublin, Bielsko-Biała, Racibórz, Żywiec and Sosnowiec, as well as Gdańsk in the north. In each of the cities, the exhibition presenting the Ancient Egyptians' art, everyday life, deities, beliefs and funerary customs, along with the results of Polish research in Egypt, proved highly successful, particularly that all of it was invariably packaged in a superb exhibition experience. A series of catalogues and guides attests to those initiatives.⁴

The largest exhibition undertakings that Aleksandra Majewska was involved in were the international exhibition *The Mysterious Queen Hatshepsut* held in 1997 at the National Museum in Warsaw, and a show she herself had put together and curated at the Museum of Egypt in Cairo, documenting 70 years of Polish excavations in Egypt. The 90s and the early noughties was a good period for Egyptology at the National Museum in Warsaw, whose Department of Ancient Art boasted no less than four Egyptologists – Prof. Jadwiga Lipińska, Dr. Joanna Aksamit, me, and Aleksandra Majewska. While our team embarked on an excavation campaign in Egypt every year, Aleksandra stayed behind, as she had rather early on stopped going on archaeological missions for family reasons. Our work together progressed wonderfully; with her mildness and inner calm, Aleksandra could mediate all of our different temperaments and counterbalance the intense and headstrong character of Prof. Lipińska, resulting in the remarkable above-mentioned exhibition on Queen Hatshepsut and her nephew/stepson successor Thotmes III, and in the new Egypt gallery opening in 2001. All four of us were involved in the development of the gallery. Aleksandra, as the Egyptian collection caretaker, oversaw all of the work in close collaboration with Prof. Lipińska, who was curator of the Collection of Ancient Art. Coming with the gallery was a wonderfully crafted and beautifully illustrated guide published in 2007, for which Aleksandra wrote the Egyptian collection introduction

³ “The art of ancient Egypt in Polish collections,” in *Acts, First International Congress of Egyptology, Cairo, October 2–10, 1976, Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients* 14, Walter-Friedrich Reineke, ed. (Berlin, 1979), pp. 443–48; “Some remarks on the exhibiting value of ancient Egyptian civilisation in the light of Polish museological studies,” in *VI Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia, Atti* (Torino, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 307–11.

⁴ I.a.: “Wierzenia grobowe starożytnych Egipcjan,” in *Wierzenia grobowe starożytnych Egipcjan*, Gdańsk Museum of Archaeology (Gdańsk, 1987), pp. 3–27; “Religia starożytnego Egiptu,” *Religia starożytnego Egiptu*, Lublin Museum and the Regional Museum in Żywiec (Lublin, 1995), pp. 3–30; “Polskie badania archeologiczne nad Nilem,” in *Sztuka Egiptu. Polskie badania archeologiczne nad Nilem*, District Museum in Sieradz (Sieradz, 1998), pp. 5–22 & 23–39 [with Moniką Dolińska]; “Starożytny Egipt. Wierzenia–Obrzędy–Magia,” in *Starożytny Egipt. Wierzenia–Obrzędy–Magia*, Museum of History and Archaeology in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski (Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, 2000), pp. 3–25 and Regional Museum in Stalowa Wola (Stalowa Wola, 2000), pp. 3–16.

and some of the descriptions.⁵ Sadly, the gallery survived only ten years due to the museum's renovation. Aleksandra Majewska retired in 2006 and said her final goodbye to the museum two years later. In 2007, she curated the exhibition *Seventy Years of Polish Archaeology in Egypt* organised at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo by the University of Warsaw's Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, and was the editor and author of the exhibition summary in the show's catalogue.⁶

Her last great success was the catalogue of Egyptian artefacts in the Wilanów collection, which for many years had been on long-term loan at the National Museum in Warsaw. Aleksandra thoroughly researched the available sources, reconstructed the objects' history and studied them.⁷ She completed the project after having suffered in 2014 a tragic accident that ruined her health and ultimately led to her death eight years later.

Aleksandra Majewska inherited a love for her homeland from her family and her patriotism came through in her everyday life. She was the noblest, most forthright and cultured person that I had the pleasure of working with from my start at the museum in 1985 to her departure in 2008.

Monika Dolińska

Translated by Szymon Włoch

⁵ See *Galeria Sztuki Starożytnej. Przewodnik*, Witold Dobrowolski, academic ed., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 2007). The guide covered the Egyptian art collection and the Ancient Near Eastern artefacts collection.

⁶ See "The Exhibition. Seventy Years of Polish Archaeology in Egypt," *70 years. Polish Archaeology in Egypt* (Warsaw, 2007).

⁷ See *Zbiory egipskie w Wilanowie*, Museum of King Jan III's Palace in Wilanów (Warsaw, 2015).